



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Medicine Bow -Routt
National Forests and Thunder
Basin National Grassland

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File Code: 1950-1

Date: 03/02/04

Dear Interested Party:

The Parks District of the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests is asking for your input concerning the development of an environmental analysis of the Buffalo Creek cattle and horse (C&H), Parkview C&H, Bear Paws Sheep and Goat (S&G), and Little Buffalo C&H grazing allotments, herein referred to as the Never Summer Analysis Area (Map 1). The proposal is to revise the existing Allotment Management Plans (AMPs) and continue to permit livestock grazing on active allotments. Your comments on the information provided below will help us: 1) Identify issues and concerns related to the proposal described below; 2) Develop alternatives to the Proposed Action; 3) Identify opportunities for area improvements; and 4) Fine-tune our proposal. For these reasons, I encourage you to take the time to consider the proposal and to submit comments on it to the Parks Ranger District by April 6, 2004.

A National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis will be completed for the proposal. The NEPA analysis is required by Section 504 of Public Law 104-19 (1995 Recession Bill), which addresses allotment analysis, grazing permit issuance, and compliance with NEPA and other environmental laws. The NEPA analysis for the above mentioned livestock grazing allotments is scheduled for completion in May, 2005.

AREA DESCRIPTION AND BACKGROUND

The Never Summer Analysis Area includes four (4) livestock grazing allotments (Map 2). The Buffalo Creek C&H, Little Buffalo C&H, and Parkview C&H allotments are located on the north slope of Haystack and Parkview Mountains in the Willow Creek Geographic Area. Major drainages include Grassy Run, Willow Creek, Parkview Creek, and Snyder Creek. The Bear Paws S&G allotment is on the west slope of Never Summer Mountains in the Owl Mountain Geographic Area. It is the source for the headwaters of the Illinois River, Jack Creek, and South Fork Michigan River. All of which are tributaries of the North Platte River. The topography is rugged and a large portion of the Analysis Area is forested. The Buffalo Creek, Little Buffalo, Parkview, and Bear Paws allotments contain approximately 51,000 acres of National Forest System lands in Jackson County, Colorado. All four allotments are easily accessible and used extensively by big game hunters.

Buffalo Creek Allotment

The Buffalo Creek Allotment was analyzed in an environmental assessment in 1998. It is being included in this analysis because one alternative will include the Buffalo Creek Allotment in the new management plan for the Little Buffalo Allotment. In addition, the Buffalo Creek Allotment



was scheduled for a re-analysis in 2007. Having it included in this analysis will complete it earlier than scheduled and provide room to include other allotments in need of Range analyses in the future.

This allotment is shared by two (2) permittees who run their cattle in common for a total of 245 cow/calf pair (c/c) on a four pasture deferred grazing system. The combined grazing capacity is for 640 AUMs on a total of 16,140 acres, of which, 2,750 acres are suitable for grazing (see table 1). An AUM is the potential intake of one animal unit, for a period of one month; based generally on 800 lbs. of dry matter.

The grazing season was originally season-long. An allotment management plan written in 1986 called for initiation of a two-herd, four pasture deferred rotation grazing system. Each permittee was to use two pastures every year. In 1990 an interim management plan was approved. It established a two pasture deferred rotation grazing system, and the permittees began running their livestock in common. According to the 1998 management plan, one permittee takes his cattle into the allotment on July 1 and keeps them on the Buffalo Cr./Lost Creek/Grassy Run pasture and the Upper Rock/Willow Creek pasture. The other permittee brings his cattle into the allotment on or around July 24 and keeps his cattle on the Lower Rock Creek/McKinnon Draw pasture and Lower Willow Creek pasture. At times, small bunches of both herds occupy the Upper Willow Creek pasture. The juncture where these herds mingle, along the riparian stringer above the junction of Forest Roads 715 and 106, receives repeated use.

The forests on the Buffalo Cr., Little Buffalo, and Parkview allotments have supported numerous timber sales over the past 50-60 years. This created a substantial amount of transitory range in years past. While transitory range still provides some additional forage, advancing plant succession has reduced the overall amount of useable transitory range. In response to the recent pine bark beetle epidemic, this area has recently been recommended, through the Green Ridge Pine Bark Beetle Analysis, for timber treatments. These treatments are scheduled to begin in the summer of 2004. This will provide an opportunity to create some transitory range in the near future.

Parkview Allotment

The Parkview Allotment, totaling 17,842 acres, is permitted for 100 cow/calf pairs from 7/16 to 9/30. It has 1,237 suitable acres for grazing and a grazing capacity of 253 AUMs. A large proportion of the allotment is heavily forested and much of the livestock grazing is restricted to aspen/lodgepole pine stands, small, open meadows along the Forest/private land boundary, and several stream reaches. The stream reaches are long, narrow, stringers of willow/riparian areas densely forested on the sides.

State Highway 125 bisects the allotment and essentially divides the allotment in half. This interferes with livestock movement and creates problems with livestock distribution along the stream reaches on the east side of the allotment and along Forest Road 106 on the west side. Old clear cut areas that once offered forage have matured and, subsequently, resulted in a reduction in the amount of transitory range. In 2002, the Parkview Allotment was integrated with the Illinois-Owl Mountain allotment to form a deferred grazing, rotation system that demands frequent riding. This helps alleviate the distribution problem on Parkview by keeping the livestock moving and on the allotment for a shorter period of time. The Illinois-Owl Mountain

Allotment was analyzed for NEPA compliance in 2000. A re-analysis of that allotment, at this point, has not been scheduled.

Bear Paws Allotment

The Bear Paws Allotment has a total of 15,300 ac., of which 3,450 ac. are classified as suitable for grazing. This is a slight reduction of its original acreage. In 1983, a portion of this allotment, the lower Silver Creek area, was added as a pasture to the Michigan C&H Allotment. This was done to remedy a trespass problem from cattle on the Michigan allotment because of inadequate barriers, natural or man made. The allotment consists primarily of high elevation spruce/fir habitat. Most of the suitable land for livestock grazing is high, alpine meadows and narrow stream reaches bordered by conifers. The original acreage in the allotment was permitted for approximately 1,150 sheep from 7/16 to 9/10 for 431 AUMs. It has been vacant since 1976 and there are no plans to stock the allotment at this time. The last range analysis was done in 1955 and indicated that quite a bit of the range was in poor and very poor condition. We hope to inventory this range in 2004 to assess current condition. The northern portion of the Never Summer Wilderness Area is included in the Bear Paws allotment and the southern portion of the Wilderness area borders the allotment (see Map 2).

Little Buffalo Allotment

The Little Buffalo Allotment is permitted for 40 cow/calf pairs from 8/16 to 9/30. It has 1,980 total acres and approximately 263 suitable acres for livestock grazing. In 1998, the Buffalo Creek Allotment, from which the Little Buffalo Allotment was created, was analyzed. However, in that analysis, the area delineating the Little Buffalo Allotment was not treated as an individual allotment. This allotment has been vacant since 1992, but several instances of trespass cattle use have been reported. In 2002, the Little Buffalo allotment was authorized for use by the two permittees on the Buffalo Allotment. The agreement was that the grazing capacity, 60 AUMs, on the Little Buffalo would be added to their term permit only when it has been determined that specific areas on the Buffalo Allotment show improvement.

There are no major streams in the Little Buffalo allotment. Several ephemeral streams begin in this allotment and flow either into Willow Creek or diverted for irrigation purposes.

Table 1. Current permitted use.

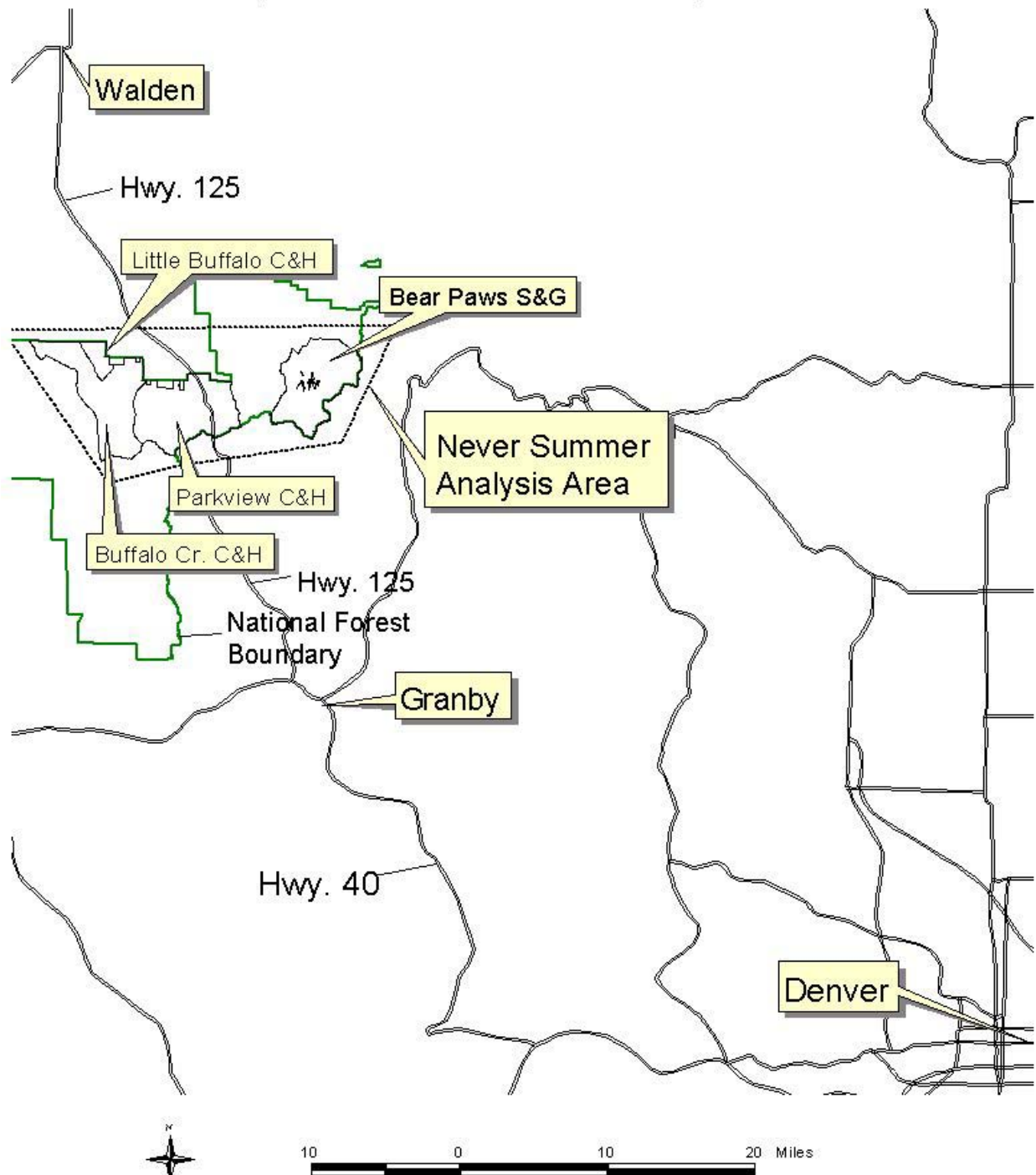
ALLOTMENT	LIVESTOCK	SEASON OF USE	TOTAL ACRES	SUITABLE ACRES	AUMs
Permittee 1-Bufferlo	110 c/c	7/1-9/30	16,140	2,780	333
Permittee 2-Bufferlo	135 c/c	7/24-9/30	16,140	2,780	306
Bear Paws	1,100 sheep	7/16-9/10	15,250	3,778	412
Little Buffalo	40 c/c	8/16-9/30	1,980	268	60
Parkview	100 cattle	7/16-9/30	17,842	1,237	253

PROPOSED ACTION

The proposed action is to continue to permit livestock grazing under current management of the four allotments. That is, the Parkview Allotment will continue to be used in rotation with the

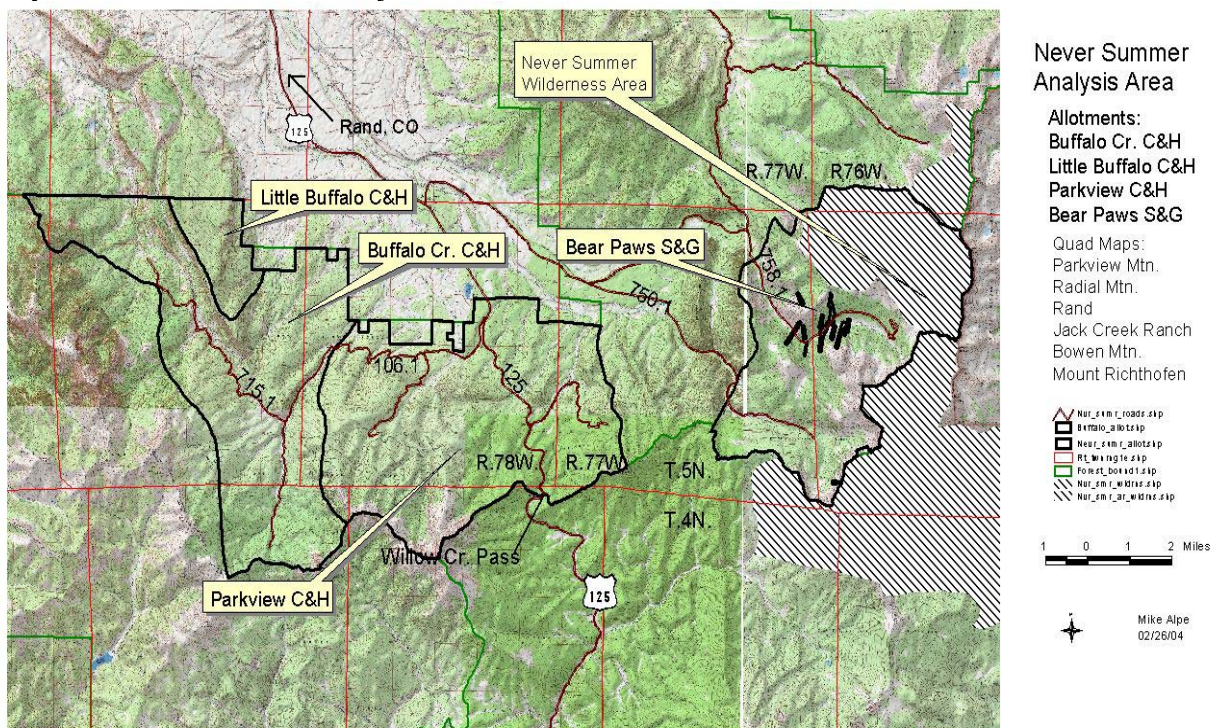
Illinois-Owl Mountain Allotment. The Little Buffalo Allotment will continue to be used in conjunction with the Buffalo Allotment. The 60 AUMs will be added to the permit after the permittees have demonstrated an ability to improve the range condition on the Buffalo Allotment. The Bear Paws Allotment will continue to be a vacant sheep and goat allotment.

Map 1 - Never Summer Analysis Area



No warranty is made by the US Forest Service as to the accuracy, reliability, or completeness of this data for individual use or aggregate use with other data

Map 2. Never Summer Analysis Area.



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PURPOSE OF AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSAL

Based on the above information, the **purpose** of the analysis is to:

- 1) Help achieve the goals, objectives, and desired condition in the Never Summer Analysis Area, as identified on Forest Plan pages 1-1 through 1-10.
- 2) Complete the appropriate NEPA analysis on the allotment.
- 3) To determine whether to continue to authorize livestock grazing on the Analysis Area.

The analysis is **needed** to:

- 1) Meet Section 504 of Public Law 104-19 which directs the Forest Service to complete NEPA analyses on existing livestock grazing allotments. Public Law 104-19 was signed into law on July 27, 1995 following the passage of the 1995 Recession Bill.
- 2) Provide direction on how authorized livestock grazing should be managed to meet Forest Plan Direction and Standards and Guidelines (Routt Forest Plan pages 1-1 to 1-26 and pages 2-42 to 2-43, respectively) for all resources.
- 3) Maintain or improve all resource conditions within the analysis area.
- 4) Identify livestock movements to meet Forest Plan goals and objectives.

PRELIMINARY ISSUES

- Impacts to riparian areas from livestock use on short sections of Grassy Run Creek, Parkview Creek, and Snyder Creek.
- Impacts to threatened, endangered, and sensitive plant and animal species in the Analysis Area.
- Concerns over river otter, bighorn sheep, lynx, and Goshawk habitat in the Analysis Area.
- Concerns over livestock grazing and OHV, and other recreational uses.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS AND DOCUMENTS

The Routt National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (Forest Plan) is an overall strategy designed to guide the management of the Forest. The intent of the direction in the Forest Plan is to manage National Forest System (NFS) lands for multiple uses. To accommodate multiple-use management, the Forest Plan contains direction for different Management Areas. Each Management Area has a different management emphasis wherein specific uses are emphasized over other uses.

The Never Summer livestock grazing allotments are located in Management Areas designated in the Forest Plan. Management Areas, as well as Management Area acres, are displayed in the Tables below. Livestock grazing is a suitable use and consistent with the Routt Land and Resource Management Plan in all of the management areas listed.

Table 2. Never Summer Management Areas and Management Area Acres.

Management Area	Buffalo Allotment (Ac.)	Parview Allotment (Ac.)	Bear Paws Allotment (Ac.)	Little Buffalo Allotment (Ac.)	Total Acres	Percent of Area
1.11			3,030		3,030	6.0
1.12			1,450		1,450	2.9
1.32	900		5,620		6,520	12.3
3.31		350	2,600		2,950	5.7
4.3			1,620		1,620	3.2
5.11	900	17,340			18,240	35.7
5.13	10,500	150	995		11,645	22.8
5.41	3,800			1,980	5,780	11.4
TOTAL	16,100	17,840	15,315	1,980	51,235	100

Management Areas:

- 1.11 – Wilderness, Pristine
- 1.12 – Wilderness, Primitive
- 1.32 – Backcountry Recreation, Non-motorized with Limited Motorized Use in Winter
- 3.31 – Backcountry Recreation, Year Round Motorized
- 4.3 – Dispersed Recreation
- 5.11 – General Forest and Rangeland, Forest Vegetation Emphasis
- 5.13 – Forest Products
- 5.41 – Deer and Elk Winter Range

NATURE OF DECISIONS TO BE MADE

As mentioned on page 1 of this document, we will be completing a NEPA analysis on the Never Summer Analysis Areas. Specific decisions to be made regarding the analysis include:

- Should livestock grazing continue to be authorized? If so, at what level should grazing be allowed within the allotments and how should livestock be managed?
- How should the Bear Paws Allotment be managed regarding livestock use and recreation use?
- How should the Little Buffalo, Buffalo, and Parkview Allotments be managed?
- What monitoring measures should be implemented to allow for adjustments of the allotment management plan to achieve the desired plant community on the allotments?

ANALYSIS SCHEDULE

Scoping is an important part of the environmental analysis process. It is used to determine the scope of issues to be addressed and for identifying the significant issues related to a Proposed Action (40 CFR 1501.7). For these reasons, I encourage you to take the time to consider our proposal and to submit your comments on it to the Parks Ranger District Office by **April 5, 2004**. Written comments should be submitted to the Parks Ranger District, Attn: Mike Alpe, P.O. Box 158, Walden, CO 80480. Telephone Number: (970) 723-8204. Fax Number: (970) 723-4610. E-mail Address: malpe@fs.fed.us

After receiving your comments, we will identify and analyze the issues raised, use the issues to develop alternatives to the Proposed Action, and make a decision whether or not to implement the Proposed Action or another alternative. Completion of this analysis process is expected in May, 2005.

This letter and request for public comments have been mailed to other federal, state, and local agencies, adjacent landowners, and individuals or organizations who may be interested in or affected by decisions related to our proposal. Notice of this public involvement effort has also been given through the local news media.

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on this proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who only submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR Part 215. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 10 days.

Thank you for caring about your National Forest!

Sincerely,

PAUL K. COWLEY

Acting District Ranger

ENCL (1)